

Directorate of Intelligence

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NOTE FOR: Director, Executive Staff

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Thought you and Bob might be interested in these comments that the Vice President made about the Agency at the Republican Leadership Conference over the weekend.

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Saturday, March 14, 1987

EXCERPTS FROM REMARKS BY
VICE PRESIDENT GEORGE BUSH
NORTHEAST REGIONAL LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE
NASHUA, NEW HAMPSHIRE
SATURDAY, MARCH 14, 1987

I'm delighted to be here among the Republican leaders of the Northeast.

Spying -- or more precisely, intelligence -- is what I want to discuss this afternoon. Two weeks ago in Bedford, Massachusetts and then again in Belford, New Hampshire, I talked about the need for SDI, the system that puts weapons at risk, not people. I talked about the need to support those fighting for freedom in Central America and about the opportunity we have to obtain a verifiable reduction in intermediate range nuclear missiles. Our intelligence system is central to all these issues.

I came here today to say that as leaders we must be more vocal and public in supporting the intelligence community in our society. We must make clear that the C.I.A. has an honorable mission. We must recognize that even in a free and open society, some things must remain secret. And I believe we must strongly support legitimate covert actions that are in our national security interests.

Certain Democrats act as if the C.I.A. is an embarrassment or a threat or just another government bureaucracy, not this country's first line of defense.

Some Republicans are conspicuously silent in their support, believing it's politically unhelpful to be associated with the Agency. Ladies and gentlemen, I am genuinely concerned about how our intelligence system will maintain public approval, unless those of us in the political arena begin to speak out on its behalf.

It is essential that we have an intelligence community second to none. Fortunately, the Agency has returned from the devastation it faced in the 1970's. Its reputation and honor were dismissed. Its budget was cut 33% in constant dollars, and it lost 25% of its personnel.

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But rather than seeking to correct the Agency's flaws, critics simply attacked. I went to the C.I.A. at the tale end of a witch hunt that laid bare the agency's inner most workings. I can remember young, untutored Congressional staffers coming to headquarters and accusing experienced professionals of not serving the interests of the country. These were people who had risked their lives for their country.

It was a terrible time. The names of agents were exposed. One result etched in my mind is the brutal murder of our station chief in Athens, Richard Welch. Two weeks after his name was listed as C.I.A. in an ugly left wing publication, two gunmen, armed with automatic pistols, cut him down at his home in Athens. Other sources, fearing for their lives, disappeared. some were killed. It was a time when many lost sight of how important the Agency was to our national security.

I learned a great deal when I had the honor of running the C.I.A., especially about leading people of purpose and integrity. And from the day I set foot inside its headquarters, I found it to be an organization whose motives were clear, and honorable, and in the national interest.

It's first priority is to prevent a surprise attack on the United States. If the C.I.A. had existed in 1941, the surprise at Pearl Harbor would've been on the Japanese, and I'll tell you how I can say that. Because taken as a whole, the Army, the Navy, and the State Department had enough information to understand what the Japanese were doing. But there was no central place for this information to come together. That place today is the C.I.A.

Our main adversaries in 1987 are the Soviets. We have an excellent understanding of their military capabilities. We know where their strategic bombers are located. We know how many strategic missiles the Soviets have. We keep track of their submarines, with reasonable accuracy. The scope of information we have today would have been astounding in 1941.

Our intelligence technology is breathtaking -- the satellite photography, the electronic, the acoustical and the seismic techniques. The American people have no idea how good it really is.

And what's more, the C.I.A. has some of the nation's brightest people to analyze this information. I wish you could meet them and get to know them like I have. The C.I.A. has more Phd.'s than any other agency of government -- enough scholars and scientists to staff a university. And let me assure you, the professionalism is too high, the devotion to country too great, to have intelligence estimates slanted and shaped by political judgements.

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They are people of principle, many of whom put themselves on the line to gain information about our enemies. I recall a young woman of about 35 who was brought into my office one day. She'd been arrested at a dead letter drop by a hostile intelligence service. She hadn't been tortured, but she'd been through a tremendous psychological ordeal. If her cover hadn't been blown, she would've gone right back. She was risking her life almost every day. No head table, no applause--a dedicated patriot serving her country to preserve the freedoms that we often take for granted. This is true integrity of purpose, and the Agency is full of such people.

A relatively new priority is collecting information necessary to thwart terrorist attacks and to interdict drug shipments.

With our allies help, from January of 1985 to February of this year, 55 probable and another 114 possible terrorist attacks were averted by deterrent action. I am talking about lives that were saved.

In Turkey, security officers last April arrested Libyan-supported terrorists who were planning to attack the U.S. Officers Club in Ankara during a wedding celebration.

In Paris, about the same time, officials thwarted a similar attack planned against citizens in a visa line at the U.S. consulate.

In North Africa last year, a Libyan-backed assassination attempt on an American military attache was foiled.

If we and our allies hadn't succeeded in cases like these, you can picture the grisly scenes that would've appeared on the evening news.

People often want to know about C.I.A. infiltration of terrorist groups. Quite honestly, we were once able to penetrate these groups much easier than we can today. They're more sophisticated in identifying our agents, and they take greater precautions than they once did. It's harder to get our people placed, because the terrorists often come from family groups. And once we do get in, it's harder to get information out.

Take, for instance, five recruits in the Bekaa Valley who have been selected by the Hizballah to blow up an American installation. They are searched. They are isolated in a guarded camp. And they aren't told until absolutely necessary what their mission is. So even if we do have someone in there, it's very hard to maintain contact.

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The C.I.A. is constantly studying developments affecting broader U.S. security. In recent years, for example, there's been more attention focused on the Soviets lag in high technology and their efforts to steal ours. We know, for example, the precise gyros and bearings in their heavy missiles were designed in the U.S. We know the radar in their AWACS planes is ours. We know that many Soviet integrated circuits are exact copies of U.S. designs. They even copied the imperfections.

The Soviets use dummy firms--some legal, some illegal--to purchase Western technology. The C.I.A. has identified some 300 firms in more than 30 countries engaged in technology transfer schemes.

The Agency looks at everything from the effects of AIDS on the stability of African countries to the consequences in Jamaica of reduced demand for bauxite. It is constantly analyzing developments that might affect our long-range security and that of our friends.

Now you may wonder where covert action fits into all this? Covert action gives us the ability to help our friends, or confuse our adversaries, in those situations where open assistance from the U.S. could be counterproductive.

It provides us with a useful foreign policy option that's somewhere between diplomacy and sending in the Marines. The world is not a sunlit meadow. The world is not the way we want it to be, but the way it is. There are dangers out there that must be addressed, and covert action is sometimes the means to do it. We seem to think covert action is James Bond and ray guns. Often, it is quiet support that saves the lives of friends.

Without doubt, there have been some serious failures in the past, such as the Bay of Pigs effort. But today, there are very strict controls.

Every covert action must be approved by the President and made known to the Congressional Oversight Committees. And this is fine, because covert actions make sense only in support of a larger foreign policy. They make sense only when properly supervised and properly planned -- that was the problem with the NSC running the Iran initiative. The C.I.A. experts never had a chance to bring their full range of experience to bear. And the formal NSC policy apparatus was not properly used. The President has made the changes necessary to keep the NSC out of operations, but have all NSC participants totally immersed in policy.

The quickest way to kill a covert action or any kind of secret activity is through a leak. And I am telling you point blank -- agents have disappeared, and I'll leave it to your own imagination what happened to them, soon after stories leaked to the news media.

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Some have been jailed. Leaks have caused other individuals, who were on the verge of becoming foreign agents for us, to back off in fear for their lives.

We have lost sources and we have lost what we call collection mechanisms. A few years ago one of the networks reported that we were intercepting communications between two unfriendly nations; communications about terrorist activities directed against Americans. Within a matter of days after the report, the channel was shut off. As a result of this reduced intelligence, american lives were put at greater risk.

Some of our allies have told us they're so concerned about our ability to keep secrets, they'll no longer provide the same information they once did, and the information they do provide will not be as timely. One intelligence service stated that terrorist information they were providing would appear in the U.S. press before they could act upon it.

The leaks come from the Congressional committees and from the Executive Branch itself. I believe a Joint Committee on Intelligence should be established to reduce the number of people who have access to very secret information. And I also believe the Administration needs to make some examples of leakers in our own ranks by publicly firing them. And I don't care how high up they are.

I don't believe in wholesale use of the polygraph, but when legitimate national security matters are at stake, I say, "use it."

Ladies and gentlemen, in the foyer of C.I.A. headquarters in Langley, Virginia, there's a Book of Honor enclosed in a glass case. It lists those C.I.A. employees who have died in service of their country. Some are named, but most even after death cannot be identified. So instead of a name, there is a simple star.

And in that same foyer is an inscription that explains why those individuals gave their lives. It's from the Bible and it says, "And Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free."

I can think of no more honorable purpose for a government agency than truth and freedom. And, as leaders, I think we should be outspoken and out front in our support for the C.I.A.

Thank you for inviting me and thank you for your hospitality.